

WORKING DRAFT DOCUMENT

Please note that this is an incomplete version of the proposed document with draft text only. It is intended to indicate the approach to the document.

The final version will include illustrative material including relevant plans with key points highlighted. To aid readers, links to documents referred to throughout the document will be added via footnotes

Please also note that the order of document is likely to be adjusted

Delivering the Vision for our Garden Town- Planning Context

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1. Purpose

1.1 This document seeks to set out and clarify the planning context for Taunton Garden Town, both nationally and locally. By preparing this document, the Council seeks to identify and signpost to policies, guidance and other relevant documentation with the aim of delivering its Vision for Taunton Garden Town as adopted by Somerset West and Taunton Council in 2019. This document will be of assistance to communities, Town and Parish Councils, Members of Planning Committee as well as planning applicants, their agents and all other participants in the planning process for development proposals within Taunton Garden Town. It is not intended that this document identify every policy and all planning guidance relevant to decision making on every planning application, and therefore does not replace the due diligence expected of planning applicants in considering the planning policies and issues that their proposals need to address. Nevertheless, by identifying specifically the Garden Town planning context, it focusses on the planning implications of the designation and associated policies, guidance and documentation.

1.2 The Council has set out its level of ambition for the future of Taunton within the adopted development plan, Garden Town specific documentation and other guidance. This document does not itself create new policy, this being reserved for development plan documents which are subject to statutory processes, consultation and Examination, which this document is not. However, by setting out and signposting to the suite of policies, guidance and documentation relevant to the Garden Town, the Council seeks to encourage applicants to respond positively to its designation and to share the ambition to deliver exemplary design, low carbon development contributing to garden community principles and the Council's Vision for the Garden Town.

2.0 Local Government Context

2.1 There are references in this document to different Councils covering the Taunton area as a result of several phases of local government reorganisation. Initial work on Taunton Garden Town commenced under Taunton Deane Borough Council. The initial phase of local government reorganisation saw the Borough Council replaced by Somerset West and Taunton Council from 1st April 2019. A further phase of reorganisation will result in the creation of Somerset Council, a new unitary council from 1st April 2023. This in turn will replace Somerset West and Taunton Council. The authorship of the different documents referred to reflect these changes in local government.

ADD DIAGRAM

2.2 Taunton has traditionally been an unparished area and the only part of Somerset without a Parish or Town Council to represent its residents. Following a community governance review, a new Town Council for Taunton will come into place from 1st April 2023. This is of particular relevance to this document due to the new Town Council becoming a statutory consultee for planning matters upon its creation.

3.0 Taunton Garden Town: Background

3.1 The 2021 Census indicates that the population of the Somerset West and Taunton local government area has increased by 8.7%, from around 144,900 in 2011 to 157,400 in 2021. This is higher than the overall increase for England (6.6%) and the wider South- West (7.8%). Taunton is the County Town of Somerset and its largest settlement. It is centrally located between Exeter and Bristol on the strategic road network, with the M5 motorway and A358/A303 corridor as well as excellent rail links. Taunton serves a large catchment extending into much of Somerset and parts of Devon. Identified as a Principal Growth Area in the Heart of the Southy West LEP's devolution bid 'A Prospectus for Productivity', Taunton is located within the Hinkley Point C housing impact area and forms the basis of the Taunton Housing Market Area. The town has traditionally had a high level of self-containment in terms of resident population working in the town.

3.2 Within the Taunton Deane Borough Council Core Strategy (2012), the Taunton urban area is identified as the strategic focus for growth in the plan area and the wider sub-region and is therefore a focal point for the allocation of new development. Policy SP1 Sustainable Development Locations provides a policy context for this,

establishing that the Taunton Urban Area will accommodate at least 13,000 new homes as well as 9,500 new jobs, sustainable transport links and a range of higher order services and facilities that will enhance and strengthen its role. The Taunton Urban Area is defined in the Core Strategy as being Taunton together with the associated settlements of Bathpool, Bishops Hull, Monkton Heathfield, Norton Fitzwarren, Staplegrove, Staplehay and Trull.

3.3 Taunton was designated as a Garden Town in early 2017 following the submission of an expression of interest to the Government. This submission reflected the Council's commitment to deliver significant new housing growth focused on a number of new garden communities towards the periphery of the town together with regeneration in the town centre. It also recognised the need to deliver a step change in the quality of new development and to ensure that it is accompanied by essential infrastructure.

3.4 The expression of interest set out a commitment to the delivery of transformational growth, confirming the strategic approach to development growth within the Core Strategy; the Taunton area as the strategic focus for growth with the authority area and sub-region. It reflected the opportunity for 13,000 new homes, 9,500 new jobs and sustainable transport links. A key driver and tool in the delivery of that growth and the vision of Taunton as a Garden Town were the new garden communities of Monkton Heathfield, Priorswood / Nerrols, Staplegrove and Comeytrove. Described as being proposed as exemplars of quality place making, it was also clearly intended that each would have a clear and distinct sense of identity, be mixed-use and places where people can meet their daily needs locally, incorporating a range of housing, employment, open space, local facilities and an environment in which people are proud to live. The expression of interest also identified opportunities in the town centre for the regeneration of brownfield sites, with particular emphasis on much of the land being in public ownership. Specific reference was made to the Firepool and Coal Orchard sites together with green infrastructure and environmental enhancement along the River Tone corridor and the creation of a high-quality north-south pedestrian route from the Railway Station to the High Street. Sites contributing to Taunton Garden Town are made up of allocations from the adopted development plan documents of the Taunton Deane Borough Council Core Strategy 2011-2028, the Site Allocations and Development Management Plan (2016) and Taunton Town Centre Area Action Plan (2008). Also relevant to the garden town is a strategic employment site, the need for which and its broad location is the subject of policy SS8 of the Core Strategy. A Local Development Order was adopted in March 2018, thereby granting planning permission for the Nexus 25 site to the south-east of junction 25 of the M5 motorway. More information on development plan site allocations is to be found in Section XXX on relevant local planning policy and Appendix 2.

ADD PLAN

3.5 Major strategic infrastructure projects were identified in the expression of interest as important to the delivery of the wider vision for the garden town. These included improvements to Taunton railway station to accommodate increased passenger numbers and provide a high quality public transport interchange, proposals

for the provision of a rapid bus corridor on the A38 serving the new communities and improving connectivity between Bridgwater, Taunton and Wellington, improved pedestrian and cycle links to the town centre and plans to re-open Wellington railway station to improve sustainable transport links to Taunton, Bridgwater, Exeter and Bristol.

3.6 The expression of interest set out the economic potential of Taunton with reference to the Hinkley Point project and associated supply chain opportunities, proposals for the delivery of a strategic employment site at Junction 25 of the M5 (Nexus) together with other planned growth and infrastructure investment associated with Junction 25 improvements, the A303/A358, railway station improvements and major housing growth and regeneration. The Council also identified training and job opportunities arising from construction projects and links with technical stakeholders and education providers. The growth cluster sectors identified in the expression of interest were business and professional services, health and care industries and high tech, scientific and advanced industries.

3.7 The Taunton Garden Town expression of interest set out an offer and a series of asks of Government, referencing opportunities to significantly accelerate housing delivery together with additional housing supply. The 'ask' of Government as set out included access to funding to increase capacity and support for the delivery of development, infrastructure planning and delivery, assistance to realise employment opportunities, town centre regeneration and integration of renewable energy generation into schemes. Access to Government housing funding streams to enable affordable housing delivery to meet need was also specifically identified.

3.8 The Government subsequently confirmed the designation of Taunton as a Garden Town in 2017, the first in the south-west of England.

3.9 Following designation, Taunton Deane Borough Council in conjunction with key partners, produced a growth prospectus for Taunton: Growing Our Garden Town 2018-2028. This set out a series of principles shaping the approach to creating a healthy, vibrant and attractive place to live and work:

- *Leadership, community engagement and ownership, enabling residents and partners to play a full and equal part in creating and maintaining our Garden Town.*
- *Collaboration, providing opportunities for residents, businesses and visitors to share ideas and shape the future of our Garden Town in a cohesive way.*
- *Enhancing our environment, creating shared spaces for leisure, recreation, food production and community use, that encourage culture, exercise, biodiversity and education.*
- *Innovative approaches to education, business and employment – from flexible working practices including home working, shared space and start-ups, to new technology, equipping people with skills for new opportunities, fostering commercial enterprise and ambition.*
- *Improving connectivity, promoting more sustainable access to services and places through better infrastructure that complements our environment including digital,*

public transport, road and rail networks, and importantly increasing cycling and walking opportunities.

• High quality design for our town – from public spaces, to other assets, our plans should be imaginative and distinctive, creating attractive, affordable low carbon housing, green infrastructure and shared spaces, that marry new and existing developments successfully.

Focussed on the local economy, growth and inward investment, rather than being prepared to primarily fulfil a planning purpose, the growth prospectus set out the Borough Council's priorities for creating the right conditions for growth and investment. Four key priorities were focused on a relatively short time horizon, with the aim of establishing an early roadmap towards achieving longer term ambitions and future success. Under each a series of projects and initiatives were identified relating to the initial five-year period:

- Housing and New Garden Communities,
- Investing for business,
- Infrastructure – enabling growth and prosperity,
- Taunton's thriving Town Centre.

3.10 This work was subsequently added to by the Vision for our Garden Town document (2019) see section XXX and was also refreshed in the Taunton Garden Town 2040: Town Centre Prospectus (2021). Taking a similar growth and regeneration focussed approach, this 2021 document draws from existing plans and strategies, to set out in one document, a framework for the future of Taunton. It is intended to act as a catalyst for regeneration, unlocking public and private investment and sets out a vision of a transformed town centre, an improved interconnected network of green spaces and liveable, walkable neighbourhoods which encourage walking and cycling. Produced after the beginning of the COVID-19 pandemic, it emphasises that a resilient Taunton needs to re-imagine its town centre, providing a more diversified offer which is not wholly dependent on retail but is based around experience and encourages town centre living and develops the leisure and cultural offer.

3.11 The Prospectus is based on the assets of the Town, including:

- The unique environment of Taunton, noting the Quantocks AONB to the north and the Blackdown Hills AONB to the south, on its way to the Somerset Levels and Moors. Within the town, there are a range of rivers, streams, green spaces and green lungs which permeate the town and provide pedestrian and cycle-links to the open countryside beyond.
- Excellent connections, which notes the town is strategically located on both the rail and highway network. Alongside a wide-ranging bus network, there are two park and ride sites with two additional park and bus sites planned at Monkton Heathfield and Comeytrove / Trull garden communities. The town is considered to be well-suited to walking and cycling opportunities. Funding was also originally secured for Taunton Railway Station, Junction 25, Toneway Corridor and Staplegrove highway delivery.

- A place to do business, which notes that alongside a range of employment sites and employers based with the Town Centre, is the strategic employment site at Nexus 25. This will provide a range of flexible premises, including areas for research and development, health, education, and digital technology alongside high-quality office-space, light industrial units and warehouses – providing almost 4,000 jobs.
- Somewhere to call home, which identified Monkton Heathfield, Nerrols, Staplegrove and Comeytrowe / Trull as key drivers of the Garden Town. These will be exemplar developments in deriving quality place-making and a new country park.

3.12 The prospectus sets out a significant number of opportunity sites, which have the potential to transform the town. These are predominantly in public ownership and consist of a cluster around the railway station and one to the west of the Town Centre. A number of other sites are committed through the planning process, including Firepool, Coal Orchard and Tangier Gas Works.

3.13 These growth prospectus documents, and in particular that from 2021 form part of the background to understanding the Council's evolving ambition for the future of Taunton following its garden town designation. Whilst not statutory planning documents, they are nevertheless of relevance to the wider context within which planning related matters are considered.

4.0 A Vision for Our Garden Town

4.1 Describing Garden Town status for Taunton as a 'once in a generation opportunity to improve the lives of our community', Somerset West and Taunton Council produced a Vision for our Garden Town which was adopted in 2019. This is considered by the Council to be a material consideration to the assessment of planning matters including applications within the garden town since it sets out clear place-making (and therefore planning relevant) ambitions for the town.

4.2 The Taunton Garden Town vision is set out as follows and is based on four key themes.

"Taunton, the County Town of Somerset will be flourishing, distinctive, and healthy – and the country's benchmark Garden Town. We will be proud to live and work in a place where the outstanding natural environment, diverse and thriving economy and inspiring cultural offer, contribute to an exceptional quality of life and well-being".

1. **Grow our town greener – transforming open spaces and streets:** This theme aims to give the town a green makeover and join up green spaces, waterways, parks and play spaces, plant more trees and woodlands and manage water more effectively.

Key schemes: Linking up watersides; connecting key destinations through green infrastructure; delivering green spaces including a Country Park, and local food-growing spaces.

2. **Branching out – moving cleaner and smarter:** This theme aims to deliver better quality of movement, which will include integrating transport networks to serves Taunton with: much improved bus networks; appropriate vehicle links to main destinations: and prioritising provision for walkers and cyclists. This will include providing alternative choices to travelling by car.

Key schemes: Making more of strategic connections; delivering inclusive and comfortable green streets and public spaces; orientating development with transit hubs and corridors; upgrading accessibility and mobility for all; and improving gateways.

3. **Growing quality places to live – town centre, new and existing neighbourhoods:** This theme will include delivering outstanding built environment focused on places and spaces with high quality neighbourhoods, green streets and public spaces and with homes and buildings that are distinctly local in appearance. Homes, offices, employment areas, public services and road infrastructure will embrace innovation, will be energy efficient and will exploit the latest sustainable technologies.

Key schemes: Delivering new garden neighbourhoods which use the sites at Firepool and Coal Orchard, ensuring clear identity with neighbourhoods that are future proofed. Design criteria such as 'Building for Life 12', 'Lifetime Homes' and 'Manual for Streets 1 & 2' should be applied.

4. **New shoots and blossom – a dynamic and prosperous community founded on knowledge, culture and business:** Ensuring quality of opportunity, which will: nourish partnership, prosperity and growth in social value; and develop on strengths in knowledge, education, culture and business. This will include: growing sustainable arts and cultural venues as hubs that foster excellence in the region; supporting low carbon and digital infrastructure to ensure the town connects businesses and markets well; and, drawing on our University Centre and growth industries in digital, land, marine informatics, health and nuclear.

Key schemes: Ensuring environmental solutions and delivering carbon reduction initiatives, improving town centre vitality and delivering a knowledge-sharing cluster (including University Centre, the UK Hydrographic Office, and Digital Taunton cluster).

4.3 The Taunton Garden Town Vision document sets out the Council's ambition for the future of the town, underpinned by the declaration of a climate emergency and the target to make the Council area carbon neutral by 2030. The Vision makes it clear that it is more far more than simply accommodating new housing growth, with wider placemaking objectives, strengthening the connections between town and country through a network of green spaces, increasing prosperity and connectivity, regenerating the town centre with a greater emphasis on town centre living and its role as the cultural heart to provide an improved experience for residents, businesses and visitors. It is clear that the Vision seeks to an enduring legacy from the Garden Town, with a higher quality natural and built environment, supporting healthier and happier places.

4.4 The Vision recognises that it will influence future plan-making and development management decisions, being an important tool in informing planning related matters going forward. The Vision significantly overlaps with a wide range of other guidance and documentation relevant to quality place-making. The Vision informs existing and future work areas of the Council including those relating to the desire to achieve exemplary design, enhance biodiversity net gain and sustainable transport and active travel. Future work areas also include a waterways strategy and implementation of stewardship proposals for community assets created by development.

4.5 The delivery of development within Taunton Garden Town in accordance with the Vision is viewed as being critical to the future of the town. Developers will be expected to take account of the Garden Town designation in drawing up their proposals and to respond positively to the Vision document produced by the Council given that it is a material planning consideration.

4.6 In order to provide focus and drive the delivery of the Vision, the Council has recently agreed formal governance proposals for the Garden Town including the establishment of a Delivery Board, a Community/Stakeholder Forum and a Developer/Landowner Forum. Terms of reference drafted for the Delivery Board include providing strategic leadership and oversight of the Taunton Garden Town project, with overall responsibility for steering the delivery of the Garden Town project, as currently described in the 2019 'Vision for Our Garden Town'.

ADD GOVERNANCE STRUCTURE DIAGRAM

5.0 National context

5.1 The Garden Community Programme and principles

5.1.1 The Town and Country Planning Association define a garden city as being

“a holistically planned new settlement which enhances the natural environment and offers high-quality affordable housing and locally accessible work in beautiful, healthy and sociable communities.”

It is important to recognise that Taunton Garden Town is part of a wider programme of garden communities. Nationally, this programme now comprises 12 garden towns (defined as over 10,000 new homes) and 35 other garden communities (between 1,500 and 10,000 new homes). The programme has expanded since its initiation in 2014, with the most recent places joining in 2019/20.

ADD PLAN OF GARDEN COMMUNITIES WITHIN THE PROGRAMME

5.1.2 In 2018 the Ministry for Housing, Communities and Local Government (MHCLG) produced a Garden Communities prospectus. This prospectus is relevant since it set out the Government's understanding what a garden community entails with a vision and expectation of high-quality place-making within the programme:

“This is about setting clear expectations for the quality of the development and how this can be maintained (such as by following Garden City principles). We want to see vibrant, mixed-use, communities where people can live, work, and play for generations to come – communities which view themselves as the conservation areas of the future. Each will be holistically planned, self-sustaining, and characterful.”

5.1.3 This expectation of high-quality place-making within designated garden communities is further set out within the prospectus:

“High quality place-making is what makes garden communities exemplars of large new developments, and all proposals must set out a clear vision for the quality of the community and how this can be maintained in the long-term, for instance by following Garden City principles. Although we are not imposing a particular set of development principles on local areas, we do expect proposals to demonstrate how they will meet and embed the key qualities below.”

The prospectus recognised and set out a series of key qualities of a garden community which together are intended to distinguish them from other development locations:

- a. Clear identity – a distinctive local identity as a new garden community, including at its heart an attractive and functioning centre and public realm.*
- b. Sustainable scale – built at a scale which supports the necessary infrastructure to allow the community to function self-sufficiently on a day to day basis, with the capacity for future growth to meet the evolving housing and economic needs of the local area.*
- c. Well-designed places – with vibrant mixed-use communities that support a range of local employment types and premises, retail opportunities, recreational and community facilities.*
- d. Great homes – offer a wide range of high quality, distinctive homes. This includes affordable housing and a mix of tenures for all stages of life.*
- e. Strong local vision and engagement – designed and executed with the engagement and involvement of the existing local community, and future residents and businesses. This should include consideration of how the natural and historic environment of the local area is reflected and respected.*
- f. Transport – integrated, forward looking and accessible transport options that support economic prosperity and wellbeing for residents. This should include promotion of public transport, walking, and cycling so that settlements are easy to navigate, and facilitate simple and sustainable access to jobs, education, and services.*
- g. Healthy places – designed to provide the choices and chances for all to live a healthy life, through taking a whole systems approach to key local health & wellbeing priorities and strategies.*
- h. Green space – generous, accessible, and good quality green and blue infrastructure that promotes health, wellbeing, and quality of life, and considers opportunities to*

deliver environmental gains such as biodiversity net gain and enhancements to natural capital.

i. Legacy and stewardship arrangements – should be in place for the care of community assets, infrastructure and public realm, for the benefit of the whole community.

j. Future proofed – designed to be resilient places that allow for changing demographics, future growth, and the impacts of climate change including flood risk and water availability, with durable landscape and building design planned for generations to come. This should include anticipation of the opportunities presented by technological change such as driverless cars and renewable energy measures.

5.1.4 The Town and Country Planning Association (TCPA) has produced significant work on best practice relating to garden communities of relevance to this document. Described as being an indivisible and interlocking framework for their delivery, the Town and Country Planning Association has set out a series of garden city principles which are of relevance to all scales of garden communities. These are identified as:

- Land value capture for the benefit of the community.
- Strong vision, leadership and community engagement.
- Community ownership of land and long-term stewardship of assets.
- Mixed-tenure homes and housing types that are genuinely affordable.
- A wide range of local jobs in the Garden City within easy commuting distance of homes.
- Beautifully and imaginatively designed homes with gardens, combining the best of town and country to create healthy communities, and including opportunities to grow food.
- Development that enhances the natural environment, providing a comprehensive green infrastructure network and net biodiversity gains, and that uses zero-carbon and energy-positive technology to ensure climate resilience.
- Strong cultural, recreational and shopping facilities in walkable, vibrant, sociable neighbourhoods.
- Integrated and accessible transport systems, with walking, cycling and public transport designed to be the most attractive forms of local transport.

The table at Appendix 1 sets out the relationship between the garden community principles expressed by the MHCLG prospectus and the TCPA and planning policies within the local Development Plan. This table has been produced to emphasise the significance of garden community principles which the Council considers as being intrinsic to the garden town designation. These principles underpin the garden town designation, resultant expectations upon development and are likely to be directly addressed within the next Local Plan. More information on future plan making is to be found at section x.

5.2 Levelling Up

ADD TEXT

5.3 Planning Reform

ADD TEXT

6.0 Local Context

6.1 Climate emergency and carbon reduction

6.1.1 The climate emergency declaration in February 2019 committed the Council to “start working towards making Somerset West and Taunton carbon neutral by 2030, taking into account emissions from both production and consumption”. Similar declarations were made by each of the Somerset local authorities. The five councils in Somerset have published a Somerset Climate Emergency Strategy. This Somerset-wide Strategy provides an overview of the key issues facing Somerset and the Councils in relation to the climate emergency and our shared ambition to work towards carbon neutrality for the county of Somerset by 2030, as well as providing a strategic basis for working towards addressing these issues collectively. The aim of the strategy is to reduce carbon emissions in the county and make Somerset a County resilient to the inevitable effects of Climate Change. The strategy provides some high-level detail explaining what is intended to be done at a Council level to address the most important issues around the Climate Emergency.

6.1.2 Somerset West and Taunton Council adopted the Somerset Climate Emergency Strategy and approved its own Carbon Neutrality and Climate Resilience (CNCR) Action Plan in October 2020. The Council’s own CNCR Action Plan sits alongside the Somerset-wide Strategy as the detail for how this Council proposes to address the specific issues, meet the identified goals and deliver on the outcomes identified within it. It identifies a total of 345 potential actions to progress over the next ten years based on current understanding, focusing on a Year 1 action plan with Year 2+ route maps.

6.1.3 The planning system plays a key role in tackling the Climate Emergency through both mitigation of and adaptation to projected climate change. The Council has a number of existing planning policies across its adopted local plans which relate to the Climate Emergency and the roles that planning can play in mitigating and adapting to climate change. Going forwards, the potential for new, updated and amended policies will be explored as part of a new Local Plan for the Somerset unitary authority area. In the meantime, the Council has approved Climate Positive Planning: Interim Guidance Statement on Planning for the Climate and Ecological Emergency.

6.1.4 Climate Positive Planning: Interim Guidance Statement on Planning for the Climate and Ecological Emergency (2022):

- Provides guidance and signposting to support adopted planning policies, national guidance and legislation in the interim period pending the adoption of future Local Plan(s)

- Underlines that the Climate Emergency is a material consideration in determining planning applications
- Identifies how requirements of development plan policy may be viewed in assessing proposals, to inform effective decision making and improve standards of new development with immediate effect; and
- Sets out that a completed Climate Emergency Checklist should be submitted alongside all planning applications at validation stage. The answers to the checklist whilst not being scored, will nevertheless feed into the Council's evaluation of the proposal under adopted planning policies.

6.1.5 Climate Positive Planning is relevant across both the former Taunton Deane and West Somerset areas (excluding Exmoor National Park) and is therefore relevant to Taunton Garden Town. It provides a resource for applicants, providing guidance on how and where they can demonstrate that their proposal responds to the Climate Emergency and existing adopted policies in this regard. For more detail on the applicability of existing planning policies and the influence of the Council's Climate and Ecological Emergency in determining planning application, please see the Climate Positive Planning, the contents of which it is not intended to duplicate in this document.

6.1.6 Of significance is the encouragement within the document for developers to aspire towards zero carbon. The Council's Vision for the Garden Town sets out a sustainable future for Taunton underpinned by carbon neutrality by 2030. Within the Garden Town there is an even greater emphasis on exemplary development that meets higher standards than those required by current planning policy and goes beyond the 2021 Building Regulations.

6.1.7 Climate Positive Planning is a "live" document that is periodically updated to reflect changes in national legislation and policy. Updates also keep explanation and guidance relevant. The current Version 2 document was published in March 2022 to take account of key changes over the 12 months following the document's original publishing. The following updates have been made for Version 2:

- Linkages between the Climate and Ecological Emergencies have been improved.
- Commentary in relation to the national legislative and policy contexts has been updated with regards to the Environment Act, Building Regulations, Net Zero Strategy, Heat & Buildings Strategy and the Levelling Up White Paper.
- Links to the Districtwide Design Guide SPD and Public Realm Design Guide SPD have been strengthened and explained better in terms of how they work with existing policy, building regulations and aspirations to go further (particularly regarding building standards).
- Linkages have been added in relation to the SWT Net Zero Carbon Toolkit
- Changes clarify that once in force, compliance with Part L 2021 of the Building Regulations will supersede the specific carbon reduction requirements of policy DM5, although other parts of DM5 will continue to be relevant. However, developers are strongly encouraged to aspire towards zero carbon and the higher aspirational standards set out in the Districtwide Design Guide SPD and the SWT Net Zero Carbon Toolkit.

- Changes note that in advance of national mandatory requirements coming into force, our existing planning policies do not explicitly require biodiversity net gain in all circumstances. However, the Council will seek to secure a 10% net gain in biodiversity from development proposals through a combination of existing policies, the NPPF, the declaration of an Ecological Emergency and clear intent from the Environment Act including the incoming upgraded Natural Environment and Rural Communities Act duty for local authorities to conserve and enhance biodiversity. More content is to be found on biodiversity and biodiversity net gain at sections XXX

ADD SECTION SWT Net Zero Carbon Toolkit

6.2 Ecological emergency

6.2.1 In September 2020 Somerset West and Taunton Council declared an Ecological Emergency complementing its Climate Emergency declaration made in February 2019. Working in partnership with Sedgemoor District Council, an Ecological Emergency Vision and Action Plan has been created to address the ecological deterioration within the district and to lessen our global impact on the natural world by 2030. Setting a series of targets, the Vision intersects with the role of planning decisions, including those within the Garden Town, upon habitats, nature recovery and tree planting, biodiversity and green infrastructure.

6.2.2 The Ecological Emergency Action Plan contains a series of proposals to develop and implement new planning policies that support ecological protection and improvement, together with the production of interim guidance and updated validation requirements.

6.3 Green infrastructure

6.3.1 **Green Infrastructure framework.** Green infrastructure (GI) is a network of green space and other urban and rural green features at all scales, which can deliver high quality of life and environmental benefits for communities. Key ecosystem services that GI can deliver are carbon sequestration; combating the urban heat island effect and air quality issues; providing natural flood management to slow the flow of water in reaching river channels at risk of flooding; providing attractive corridors for active travel and biodiversity; bringing physical and mental health benefits and re-connecting us to and educating us in our landscapes and nature.

6.3.2 Through the Garden Town vision and themes, the Council has already committed to significantly improving GI, maximising greenery and looking for more natural solutions to manage runoff around and within Taunton. Good GI builds on the existing ecosystems and habitats within the site, it plants the right trees in the right places for the right reasons, it enables regenerative practices to re-wild areas and maximises the benefits to both humans and the natural world.

6.3.3 The Green Infrastructure Framework - Principles and Standards for England (2023) provides guidance and further information on how to create high-quality green infrastructure and promote nature-rich environments that increase the functionality, sustainability, and climate resilience of urban areas.

6.3.4 Green Infrastructure policy: Garden Town. Taunton is located within a unique and rich wider landscape. Significant areas of the landscape surrounding the town are of national importance, with the Quantock Hills AONB to the north and Blackdown Hills AONB to the south. Between these two designated sites lies the Vale of Taunton Deane within which Taunton is located. The Vale is characterised by predominantly rural land with low hills and floodplains. The unique characteristics of the open spaces is a main element that inform the design and provision of the town's Green Infrastructure and helps to maintain local identities.

6.3.5 The Council has been proactive in safeguarding the green spaces within and around the town through a series of policies, studies and guidelines. Green Infrastructure has the potential to provide climate mitigation solutions, deliver biodiversity gains and improve public health and community wellbeing in a more holistic and sustainable approach.

6.3.6 The Taunton Deane Core Strategy 2011-2028 identifies the contribution of Green Infrastructure to climate change mitigation and adaptation through Strategic Objective 1 (Climate Change). Components of green infrastructure are also mentioned in other strategic objectives, including the following:

- Strategic Objective 5 (Inclusive Communities), which addresses the provision of and access to all types of open spaces, including allotments, built sports facilities, community halls, green space, playing pitches, young children's and young people's play spaces to reduce inequalities and deliver more prosperous, cohesive communities.
- Strategic Objective 6 (Accessibility) aims to improve accessibility between homes, jobs and services and achieve a major change in travel behaviour towards walking, cycling and public transport. This strategic objective supports the development of cycle paths that can also be used as green corridors linking with the green infrastructure network.
- Strategic Objective 8 (Environment) recognises the importance of biodiversity and seeks: 'To maintain and enhance biodiversity, the natural and man-made environment' and requires new developments to contribute to improving the quality of the environment within the town.

6.3.7 Through Policy CP7 (Infrastructure), the Core Strategy requires green infrastructure to be secured through developer contributions. Policies CP1 (Climate Change) and CP8 (Environment) within the Core Strategy set out requirements to achieve no net loss in biodiversity and to conserve and enhance the natural and historic environment.

6.3.8 Policy CP8 (Environment) within the Core Strategy also outlines that the GI elements should be retained and enhanced, including through the development of green wedges and green corridors, as envisaged through the Taunton Deane Green Infrastructure Strategy 2009.

6.3.9 Relevant Local Plan documents and other studies and database covering Taunton in relation to Green Infrastructure are:

- Site Allocations and Development Management Plan (SADMP) (2016) sets out detailed site allocations for development and contains detailed development management policies. The Development Management Policies seek to promote elements of Green Infrastructure, including protecting trees, woodland and hedgerows; maximising tree planting within new developments; enhancing landscape features; improving public access to waterways and the environmental quality of these assets;
- The Taunton Deane Play Strategy (2015) sets out the vision for play in Taunton - “Good quality, accessible, free play provision across the borough which challenges and stretches children and young people’s abilities”. It’s also setting the requirements for play provision for children and young people, its accessibility, quality and quantity
- Taunton Playing Pitch Strategy 2016-2028 seeks to protect and enhance the provision of outdoor sports pitches and associated facilities by ensuring that the quality, quantity, and location meet the standards set out by Sport England.
- Taunton Deane Green Wedge Assessment (2015) Aim to protect, conserve or enhance green wedges and open breaks between settlements to protect the rural character and provide connections to nature

6.3.10 Taunton Deane Borough Council produced a Green Infrastructure Strategy in 2009. the main aim of the strategy was “to ensure that high quality, multifunctional green infrastructure is delivered across the borough.” The Strategy identified an ambitious 45 GI opportunity projects, which consisted of 41 spatially specific projects and four Borough-wide opportunities. The majority of projects were focused within Taunton area with some opportunities within Wellington and other settlements. It was also used as evidence base document to inform the current Local Plan and led to a number of policies and requirements as noted above.

6.3.11 Taunton Deane Borough Council subsequently produced the Green Infrastructure Opportunities Update report in 2017 with the aim of identifying GI opportunities for the major development sites and the allocated new garden communities surrounding Taunton. The 2017 document also reviewed and updated the GI opportunities identified in the 2009 strategy.

6.3.12 The 2017 strategy identified seven key GI themes and provided summaries of the strengths and weaknesses of each one. It also sets eight site-specific projects many of which relate specifically to the Taunton Garden Town area and another five Borough-wide initiatives which are also relevant, as follows:

- Proposed Green Infrastructure projects:
 - Gateways to protected landscapes - improving linkages and connections between the Town and the countryside, Quantock Hills AONB to the north and Blackdown Hills AONB to the south
 - Enhancing Taunton’s Waterways - improving access along (and to) the river and canal within the Taunton area
 - Create Cycle/ Pedestrian link from Taunton via the River Blackbrook - connect the town cycle network to the National Cycle Network Routes that runs east to the town.

- Develop a new Country Park at Monkton Heathfield
- Provide a new recreational access at Pyrland Park
- Improving connections and the development of Norton Camp Hillfort
- Improving Gateways to the Garden Town at Taunton Railway Station and Bus Station
- Discovering the industrial heritage at Wellington
- Borough-wide initiatives:
 - Dig and Dine - Identify potential locations for small scale food growing initiatives
 - Taunton Open Air Arena - provide a large-scale public event area at a suitable location
 - Pedestrian/cycle bridges in East Taunton, bridges over the M5 and A358 corridors to provide access to nature
 - SPONGE 2020 - develop innovative, nature-based solutions to address surface water flooding and related problems in different areas of Somerset
 - Taunton Garden Town Explorer - the development of digital tools to enable residents and visitors to receive points of interest, including the stories behind Taunton's green spaces and heritage buildings, via smartphones

6.3.13 The Garden Town Vision proposed a comprehensive approach to improve the quality of development, strengthen the connections between town and country through a network of green spaces and protected wedges, develop the waterways as part of the natural green and blue network, deliver a more prosperous Taunton and improve connectivity. The different components of GI are key elements for realising the Vision for the Garden Town. To this end at Appendix 3 is GI guidance and a check sheet have been drafted to assist the planning application process within the Garden Town. For use by developers, design teams and consultants, the GI checklist seeks to ensure a holistic approach to these matters is taken from the early stages of the design process in order to protect, enhance and maintain TGT's green spaces, landscape and ecology. Aiming to promote best practice design solutions, the checklist sets out the Local Planning Authority's expectations for GI, asks a series of key questions to ensure consideration of GI matters and sets out what supporting material including drawings, reports or other evidence may be required to determine whether GI has been considered and integrated into the design proposal.

6.4 Biodiversity Net Gain

6.4.1 The Environment Act 2021 sets clear statutory targets for the recovery of the natural world in four key areas: air quality, biodiversity, water, and waste, including to reverse the decline in species abundance by the end of 2030. It is important legislation which emphasises the importance of improving the environment and leaving it in a better state than we found it.

6.4.2 Under the Environment Act, all new developments, including national infrastructure projects, are required to assess the habitat and biodiversity present on

the site before and after the new development. The Act requires a minimum of 10% biodiversity net gain (BNG) to be secured for a minimum of 30 years. Regulations are expected to formally bring in the requirement from autumn 2023 at which point any new scheme including those in the Garden Town will be expected to provide a biodiversity net gain plan which should include the following:

- The set of measures that are required to minimise the impact on habitats/ecosystems
- The pre and projected post-development biodiversity value, showing at least a 10% net gain, based on the Defra Metric 3.0.
- Any offsite biodiversity credits and gains
- Stewardship and Maintenance strategies that clearly set out net gain outcomes through habitat creation or enhancement for a minimum of 30 years after the scheme has been completed

6.4.3 The Council seeks to secure BNG on planning applications where relevant and appropriate in advance of national mandatory requirements coming into force. The existing planning policies do not explicitly require biodiversity net gain in all circumstances. However, the Council will seek to secure a 10% net gain in biodiversity from development proposals through a combination of existing local and national policies as set below:

Strategic Objective 8 (Environment) in Taunton Deane Core Strategy seeks to “maintain and enhance biodiversity, the natural and man-made environment”. Policy CP 1 (Climate Change) within the strategy states that development proposals should result in a sustainable environment and will be required to incorporate measures which promote and enhance the resilience of ecosystems and biodiversity networks within and beyond the site. Policy CP 8 set out requirements to achieve no net loss in biodiversity and to conserve and enhance the natural and historic environment.

6.4.4 The Somerset Climate Emergency Strategy and the Council's Carbon Neutrality and Climate Resilience (CNCR) Action Plan both highlight the importance of supporting Somerset's natural environment delivering biodiversity gain and protecting indigenous flora and fauna. The Council's Ecological Emergency Vision and Action Plan includes the following BNG specific action (2.4): “Landscape management schemes on new developments deliver high quality habitats that support wildlife and have long term maintenance plans in place meeting 10% Biodiversity Net Gain requirement as a minimum.”

6.4.5 The Districtwide Design Guide Supplementary Planning Document sets out how consideration of the potential to deliver BNG should be integral to site design right from understanding the site context and development of the initial design concept.

6.4.6 The Climate Positive Planning: Interim Guidance Statement on Planning for the Climate and Ecological Emergency states that the “Council will seek to secure a 10% net gain in biodiversity from development proposals using a combination of policy CP8 of the Core Strategy, the NPPF, the declaration of an Ecological Emergency and clear intent from the Environment Act including the incoming upgraded Natural Environment

and Rural Communities Act duty for local authorities to conserve and enhance biodiversity”

6.4.7 The Council is a partner in the newly reformed Local Nature Partnership (LNP), through which a Local Nature Recovery Strategy (LNRS) is being developed for Somerset. The LNRSs will identify where actions should be made for nature’s recovery as well as where nature-based solutions can help address wider environmental problems. The LNP will be a key forum for co-ordinating and delivering actions in line with the proposed Nature Recovery Network (NRN) Strategy.

6.4.8 The Council is also working with the other Somerset Councils and the Local Nature Partnership (LNP) on the preparation of a BNG Guidance Note for planning. Processes and arrangements for the implementation, management and monitoring of BNG are being worked out in association with the production of this guidance.

6.5 Phosphates

6.5.1 On 17 August 2020, all the planning authorities in Somerset received an advice note from Natural England concerning the unacceptable levels of phosphates in the Somerset Levels and Moors Ramsar site. Phosphates are a salt containing the element phosphorus. They occur naturally through the weathering and erosion of rocks, or in agriculture and food production, through the use of fertilisers and food additives, and in animal and human waste. A high level of nutrients in rivers and lakes affects water quality. Increased nutrient loads causes an excess growth of algae in the water, which in turn deteriorates water quality and depletes the oxygen, which plants and animals need to survive. This process is known as eutrophication.

6.5.2 In light of a court Judgment (known as Dutch N), (Joined Cases C-293/17 and C-294/17 Coöperatie Mobilisation for the Environment UA and Others v College van gedeputeerde staten van Limburg and Others) Natural England have advised that, in light of the unfavourable condition of the Somerset Levels and Moors Ramsar Site, before determining a planning application that may give rise to additional phosphates within the catchment, competent authorities should undertake a Habitats Regulations Assessment (HRA) proceeding to an appropriate assessment on individual projects.

6.5.3 Before determining a planning application that may give rise to additional phosphates within the catchment an Appropriate Assessment is required. The Appropriate Assessment needs to demonstrate how the proposed development will achieve phosphate neutrality - to prove beyond reasonable scientific doubt that no likely significant effects on the integrity of protected sites would occur. Thus the Appropriate Assessment is used by ecologists to test whether proposals meet the requirements in the Habitats Regulations. It is unlawful for the Council to grant planning permission unless these assessments can achieve nutrient neutrality. The Government set out advice in the Written Ministerial Statement that the Habitats Regulations requirements apply to reserved matters and discharge of conditions applications. The November 2022 appeal decision at Jurston Farm, Wellington (APP/W3330/22/3296248) confirmed this.

6.5.4 The types of development to which is applies include:

- New residential units - including tourist accommodation, gypsy sites /pitches.
- Commercial developments - where overnight accommodation is provided.
- Agricultural Development - additional barns, slurry stores etc. where it is likely to lead to an increase in herd size.
- Prior Notifications of agricultural development where, as a result of the development, the herd size may increase. Also, prior notifications for change of use of office to dwellings and agricultural buildings to dwellings.
- Anaerobic Digesters.
- Some tourism attractions.

6.5.5 Since receipt of Natural England's letter, the affected Councils in Somerset have been working hard to minimise delay and uncertainty around planning applications following recent guidance over unacceptable amounts of phosphates in the Somerset Levels and Moors. This work includes the production of a county-wide nutrient strategy to identify both short term solutions to help clear the current backlog of planning permissions and longer-term solutions to address the existing and future growth commitments. A phosphate calculator has been developed and Somerset West and Taunton Council has created a phosphate credit scheme to offset development in the River Tone catchment. Development proposals in Taunton lie within the River Tone catchment and accordingly phosphates is an important issue within the garden town due to its relationship with new development. By prioritising affordable housing and small-scale SME schemes it is expected that the phosphate credit scheme will allow for the unlocking of some smaller scale development within the Taunton Garden Town area. However, as the larger strategic scale sites fall outside of this scheme, separate proposals for phosphate mitigation will be required to bring these developments forward.

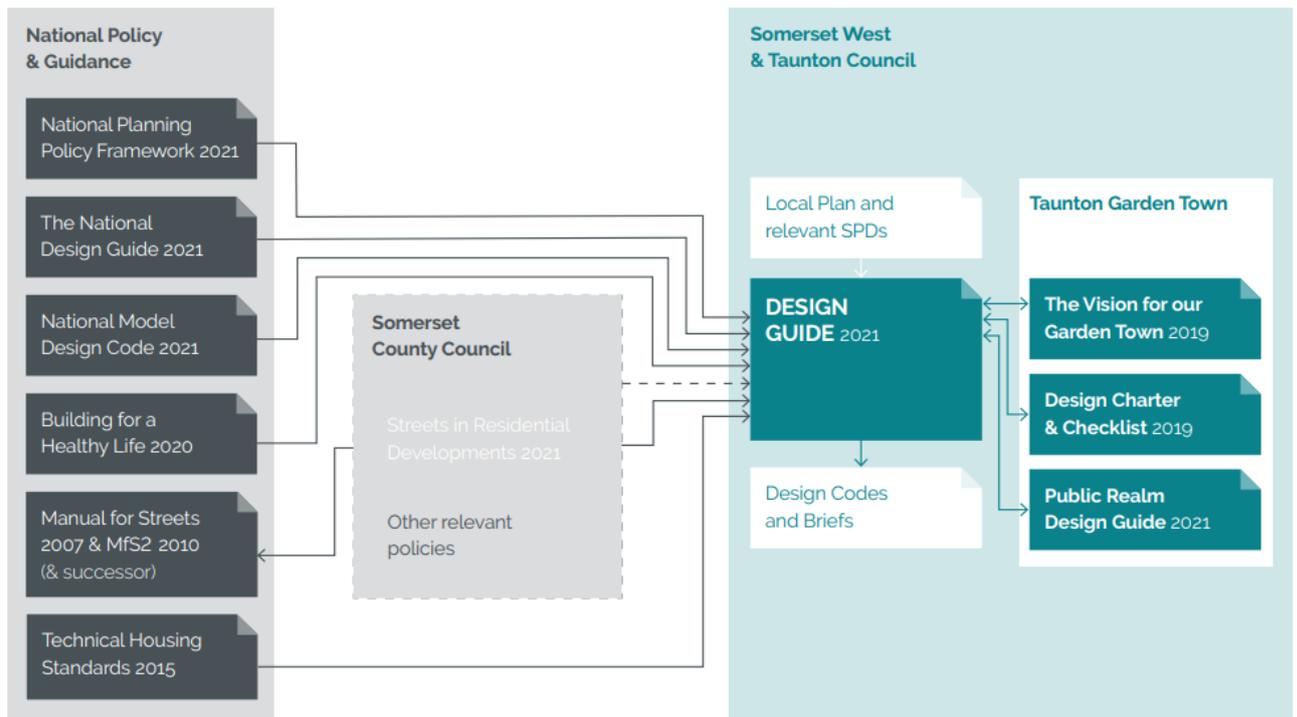
6.5.6 As of February 2022, there were approximately 148 planning applications waiting in abeyance across the former Taunton Deane area, totalling approximately 3,200 dwellings, many of which are within the Garden Town. In addition, several of the large development sites in the Garden Town have previous outline planning permission, have also been delayed in coming forward pending resolution of phosphate mitigation. The first significant mitigation scheme to address the phosphates created from a strategic site proposal in the Garden Town is via a proposed wetland. This was granted planning permission in February 2023 and relates to the Staplegrove West development.

6.5.7 Through the Levelling Up and Regeneration Bill, the Government has set out an intention to introduce a legal requirement on water companies to upgrade treatment works serving more than 2,000 population to technically achievable limits by 2030 and amend the HRA process so that these upgrades to plants/wastewater treatment works are deemed certain when calculating phosphate mitigation post 2030. However at time of writing, these provisions are yet to be legally enacted but have the potential to reduce the extent of phosphate mitigation required to mitigate the impact of development after 2030.

6.6 Design

Extemporary design.

ADD TEXT ON SUITE OF DESIGN GUIDANCE



6.6.2 The Design Charter and Checklist 2019

ADD TEXT

6.6.3 **Design Guide Supplementary Planning Documents.** The Council has adopted two design guide supplementary planning documents that are material planning considerations and afforded weight in the decision-making process when determining planning applications within the Garden Town. **The Taunton Garden Town Public Realm Design Guide SPD (2021)** illustrates the Council's aspirations for maintaining and improving the public realm design quality across Taunton Garden Town.

6.6.4 The purpose of the Public Realm Design Guide for Taunton Garden Town is to raise the standard of the public realm and streetworks consistently across the Garden Town. The guidance is aimed at guiding the design of public realm and street works by the highway authority, developers, utility companies and their agents and contractors. It also attempts to show how current principles of highway design and layout can be incorporated into good placemaking. It demonstrates that meeting the challenges of the climate emergency through sustainable, energy efficient, low carbon and climate resilient measures is integral to high quality design and placemaking, and in doing so brings major benefits to other key aspects of good design, such as health and wellbeing. It also attempts to show how principles of good practice in street design and layout can be incorporated into good placemaking.

6.6.5 The Council has also adopted the **Design Guide SPD** for the whole Somerset West and Taunton Council area which illustrates the Council's aspirations for maintaining and improving the design quality across the Somerset West and Taunton area. The guide specifically addresses zero carbon, healthy, resilient and distinctive environment aspects of good design and was adopted in 2021.

6.6.6 The purpose of the Districtwide Design Guide is to seek a step change in the quality of new development in the district in support of adopted local plan policies. It aims to ensure that the significant level of development and housing growth needed in the district to meet future need is designed to create healthy, inclusive, sustainable places to live for everyone promoting a common approach to the main principles which underpin the various adopted Local Plans that are used for assessing planning applications.

6.6.7 It demonstrates that meeting the challenges of the climate emergency through sustainable, energy efficient, low carbon and climate resilient measures is integral to high quality design and placemaking, and in doing so brings major benefits to other key aspects of good design, such as health and wellbeing. It also attempts to show how principles of good practice in street design and layout can be incorporated into good placemaking.

6.6.8 The Design Guide identifies by icon throughout the document where the specific topic and its guidance is likely to be of particular relevance to Taunton Garden Town and cross references with the wider suite for design documentation that applies to the Garden Town context.

6.6.9 **Quality Review Panel.** The Council is committed to ensuring that development is delivered to the highest standard and that new proposals exhibit high quality design in its broadest sense - architectural, urban and landscape design, planning, transport, sustainability and deliverability will all be essential elements to the creation of the quality placemaking.

6.6.10 To help ensure that these aspirations are fulfilled, the Council has established an independent Quality Review Panel to provide critical friend advice and guidance to applicants and the local planning authority to support the delivery of high-quality development in Somerset West and Taunton, including Taunton Garden Town.

6.6.11 The Council expects Applicants to make use of the panel at an early stage in the design process to identify and test the proposed design's key objectives and assumptions. The review of an emerging scheme at pre-application stage is ideal as it ensures that feedback from the Panel is able to be addressed before the design is finalised for planning application submission. The Council will generally expect schemes of more than 50 homes or 5,000 sq metres of commercial/other floorspace to be informed by review. Other smaller complex schemes may also be appropriate for review.

6.6.12 The Panel's advice to the applicants and to the Local Planning Authority supports sound planning decisions in respect of design quality and the advice provided is a material planning consideration in the determination of planning applications. It is intended to assist Council officers and applicants to achieve design improvements and

support planning committee decisions, where design quality is a key consideration such as within the Garden Town.

6.6.13 Terms of reference for the Panel have been produced where information on the process, panel members, review types and cost are also to be found.

6.7 Transport and active travel

ADD TEXT

Bus Service Improvement Plan, bus priority and mobility hubs

Local Cycling and Walking Infrastructure Plan

Connecting Our Garden Communities

Active Travel England

Reducing the need to travel, prioritising public transport and active travel modes

EV charging

6.8 Infrastructure Delivery plan

ADD TEXT

6.9 Stewardship

ADD TEXT

7.0 Relevant Local Planning Policy and Guidance

7.1 The Local Development Plan

7.1.1 Section 70(2) of the Town and Country Planning Act 1990, as amended ("the 1990 Act), requires that in determining any planning applications, regard is to be had to the provisions of the Development Plan, so far as is material to the application and to any other material planning considerations. Section 38(6) of the Planning and Compulsory Purchase Act 2004 (as amended) ("the 2004 Act") requires that planning applications should be determined in accordance with the development plan unless material considerations indicate otherwise. The development plan is therefore the starting point for planning application assessment.

7.1.2 The Development Plan relevant to Taunton Garden Town comprises:

- Taunton Town Centre Area Action Plan (2008)
- Taunton Deane Core Strategy (2012),
- Taunton Deane Site Allocations and Development Management Plan (SADMP) (2016),
- Somerset Minerals Local Plan (2015)
- Somerset Waste Core Strategy (2013)
- Somerset Minerals Local Plan (2015)
- Somerset Waste Core Strategy (2013)

ADD DIAGRAM

7.1.3 The parts of the Development Plan relating to minerals and waste are not considered to be primary plans against which development proposals for the Garden Town will be determined unless specific minerals or waste issues are raised by the proposal or site such as the need for a site waste management strategy and plan for larger development proposals and provision for the storage and separation of domestic /commercial waste. Minerals safeguarding areas for sand and gravel in the Taunton area are considered during plan making and site allocation.

7.1.4 Also part of the Development Plan are neighbourhood plans that have gone through the planning process and have been 'made'. Those relevant to Taunton Garden Town and its allocations are:

Neighbourhood Plan	Relevant allocation sites within the Garden Town
Creech St Michael (2019)	Monkton Heathfield (policy SS1 Core Strategy)
Trull and Staplehay (2017)	Comeytrove/ Trull (policy TAU1 SADMP)
West Monkton and Cheddon Fitzpaine (2017 and updated 2022)	Monkton Heathfield (policy SS1 Core Strategy) Priorswood / Nerrols (policy SS2 Core Strategy) Pyrland Farm (policy TAU3 SADMP) East of Crown Industrial Estate (policy TAU10 SADMP) Former Priorswood Landfill (policy TAU11 SADMP)

7.1.5 The tables in Appendix 2 go through each of the Development Plan documents in turn, identifying and summarising the specific planning policies considered relevant to the garden town. It should be noted that this Appendix does not seek to identify every planning policy that might be relevant to every potential development proposal within the Taunton area. Instead, it seeks to focus on the key policies that have a particular relevance to the garden town and delivering the Council's Vision for it. For a similar policy summary and commentary in relation to the climate and ecological emergencies, please refer to Climate Positive Planning (2022) Appendix 1. It is not proposed to replicate the policy tables in that document.

7.2 Core Strategy (2012)

7.2.1 The Core Strategy sets out strategic objectives relevant to the planning context for Taunton Garden Town. They form the basis upon which a series of core policies are based: addressing climate change, local economy, enhancing the role and function of Taunton town centre, to provide a sufficient supply of high-quality housing, to reduce inequalities and deliver more prosperous, cohesive communities and to improve accessibility and achieve a major travel behaviour change towards walking, cycling and public transport. Further relevant strategic objectives include ensuring development provides or contributes to necessary infrastructure, mitigating impact on

existing communities and the environment and maintaining/enhancing biodiversity, the natural and man-made environment, minimising the need to travel, waste, pollution and their use of non-renewable resources, promoting good design and materials respecting and enhancing local distinctiveness. Although a former Taunton Deane district wide approach is taken, there is significant overlap in these strategic objectives with the themes within the Vision for the Garden Town.

7.2.2 A series of core policies derive from the strategic objectives and relate to climate change, the economy, a hierarchy of centres, housing supply, inclusive communities, transport and accessibility, infrastructure and the environment. These policies are summarised in Appendix 1 and are of strategic policy relevance to planning matters within the Garden Town.

7.2.3 Spatial policies within the Core Strategy set out the quantum and distribution of development planned for within the plan period up to 2028, with reference to locations for development being focussed on those that are most sustainable and accessible. The Taunton urban area is identified as the strategic focus for growth, both within the former Taunton Deane area and the wider sub-region (policy SP1). It is the focal point for new development, sustainable transport links and a range of higher order services and facilities. As a result, several strategic locations are identified for growth as new sustainable communities. These equate to the garden communities within the Vision for Taunton Garden Town.

7.2.4 Of relevance to this document is the Vision for Taunton set out within the Core Strategy and spatial policy SP2 on realising that Vision. These proceed and inform the Vision for the Garden Town. Their presence within the adopted Development Plan places material planning decision making weight on their contents.

Our Vision for Taunton (Core Strategy)

Taunton, the county town of Somerset, with its main-line rail connections and access to the M5, is suitable for sustainable balanced growth, reinforcing its role as an important sub-regional centre within the South West region. An attractive market town with a rural hinterland, yet strategically located between Bristol and Exeter, Taunton is the most important settlement in the Borough, surrounded by a diverse and high-quality natural environment, with potential for growth.

The growth priority is to regenerate the town centre providing a stronger and more vibrant core with a dynamic and diversified economy, a choice of residential accommodation, retail, leisure, community, sporting and cultural facilities. A wider range of better paid jobs will provide opportunities to retain more young people in the area. The River Tone will become an attractive corridor through the heart of the town, linking the redevelopment sites. Having maximised the opportunities for growth on brown field sites in the town centre, most of the remaining requirements for growth will be met in sustainable, high quality urban extensions in existing public transport corridors.

Outside the town centre, major new neighbourhoods such as Monkton Heathfield will be well connected to Taunton and known as exemplars of quality placemaking. They will be mixed use developments where people can meet their daily needs

locally, incorporating a range of accommodation, employment, housing, open space, local facilities and an environment in which people are proud to live.

Despite accommodating substantial levels of growth, the urban form of Taunton will remain self-contained, below ridge lines which are sensitive to development and preserving the setting and character of the Quantock Hills AONB and Blackdown Hills AONB. Green wedges between different areas of the town will be retained and enhanced, helping to provide a network of green infrastructure linking the heart of the town with the surrounding countryside.

There are considerable areas in common between the Vision for Taunton in the Core Strategy and that within the Vision for Taunton as a Garden Town. The latter is therefore considered to be based upon and to align with that in the Core Strategy.

7.2.5 Policy SP2 sets out how the Vision for Taunton within the Core Strategy will be realised. All aspects of this policy are relevant to the wider planning context for Taunton as a Garden Town as it encompasses strategic issues. These strategic issues are listed within Appendix 2.

ADD TEXT KEY GARDEN TOWN DEVELOPMENT ALLOCATIONS AND IDENTIFICATION OF BROAD LOCATIONS FOR GROWTH WITHIN THE CORE STRATEGY

7.3 Site Allocations and Development Management Plan (SADMP)(2016)

ADD TEXT INCLUDING HOW THE BROAD LOCATIONS FOR GROWTH SET OUT IN THE CORE STRATEGY ARE FOLLOWED THROUGH INTO STRATEGIC ALLOCATIONS WITHIN THE TAUNTON GARDEN TOWN AREA

7.4 Taunton Town Centre Area Action Plan (2008)

ADD TEXT SUMMARISING RELEVANCE

7.5 Neighbourhood Plans

7.5.1 **Creech St Michael 2019** Part of the Monkton Heathfield garden community lies within Creech St Michael Parish. The majority of the remaining area of the Monkton Heathfield development allocation site is located within the area covered by the Creech St Michael Neighbourhood Plan which was made in 2019. Section 4 of the Plan deals with the Monkton Heathfield urban extension and at 4.1.5 and 4.1.6 confirms that due to the requirement that the neighbourhood plan be in conformity with Somerset West and Taunton Council's Development Plan (including allocation policy SS1), the neighbourhood plan does not propose any specific policies for the Monkton Heathfield site. Nevertheless, the plan contains a series of relevant general policies.

7.5.2 Section 4 of the Plan makes reference to garden town principles and that Parish residents existing and future will have high expectations of the new development with reference to criterion within Core Strategy policy SS1 and the following statement

'Creech St Michael Parish calls on all interested parties to work collaboratively to deliver a high-quality development for Monkton Heathfield that reflects the Garden Town Principles'.

7.5.3 Trull and Staplehay (2017)

ADD TEXT

7.5.4 West Monkton and Cheddon Fitzpaine 2022 The Neighbourhood Plan was originally made in 2017 and since updated in 2022. It relates to majority of the Monkton Heathfield garden community allocation site. Much of the allocation within the Neighbourhood Plan area has planning permission and has been built out with smaller areas remaining. The plan sets out a vision to successfully accommodate the significant growth planning and to ensure high quality design with the creation of sustainable places with excellent community facilities for local people to enjoy. The plan further articulates housing, transport, employment, recreation and environment objectives. Many of these policy objectives are picked up within other parts of the development plan. The plan includes a range of relevant policies.

7.5.5 The 2022 update to the Neighbourhood Plan has brought in several material modifications. Notable is a new policy H5 Building and Climate and Change requiring building styles and materials that address the climate change emergency to be included in all new builds and highly energy efficient building development proposals should demonstrate a net emission rate of zero or below when performance monitored or are certified by a quality regime. Measures to reduce carbon emissions are supported (with reference to Part L of the Building Regulations). Policy T5 is amended to include a timing requirement for the provision of walking and cycling routes on major development such that they are delivered before or soonest after first occupancy.

7.6 Local Development Order: Nexus 25

7.7 Future Local Plan for Somerset

7.7.1 With the creation of a new unitary Council for Somerset on 1st April 2023 there is a legal requirement to adopt a new Local Plan within five years of that date.

7.7.2 It is expected that the next Local Plan covering the Taunton area will include planning policies reflective of the garden town designation and associated garden community principles.

7.7.3 Local government reorganisation in Somerset has therefore overtaken the initial Local Plan review work commenced by Somerset West and Taunton Council. The first stage of the Local Plan Review 2040 was the production of an Issues and Options document looking at key issues for the area, including Taunton and suggesting ways they could be addressed. The issues identified through this process include how to plan for the places and spaces we live and work in; community services, shops, transport and infrastructure; our wildlife and landscapes; and the climate emergency. The Issues and Options document was consulted upon between Monday 13 January and Monday 16 March 2020.

7.7.4 Despite not continuing with the Local Plan Review, the information gathered through consultation and the evidence base will inform the future Local Plan for the new Somerset Council.

8. National Planning Policy Context

8.1 National Planning Policy Framework

8.2 National Design Guidance

ADD TEXT

National Design Guide

National Model Design Code

Other- Beauty, provably popular, 15/20-minute neighbourhoods (living locally)

Creation of the Office for Place

WORKING DRAFT